

Data Collection Dilemmas Among Hard-to-Reach Homeless People:

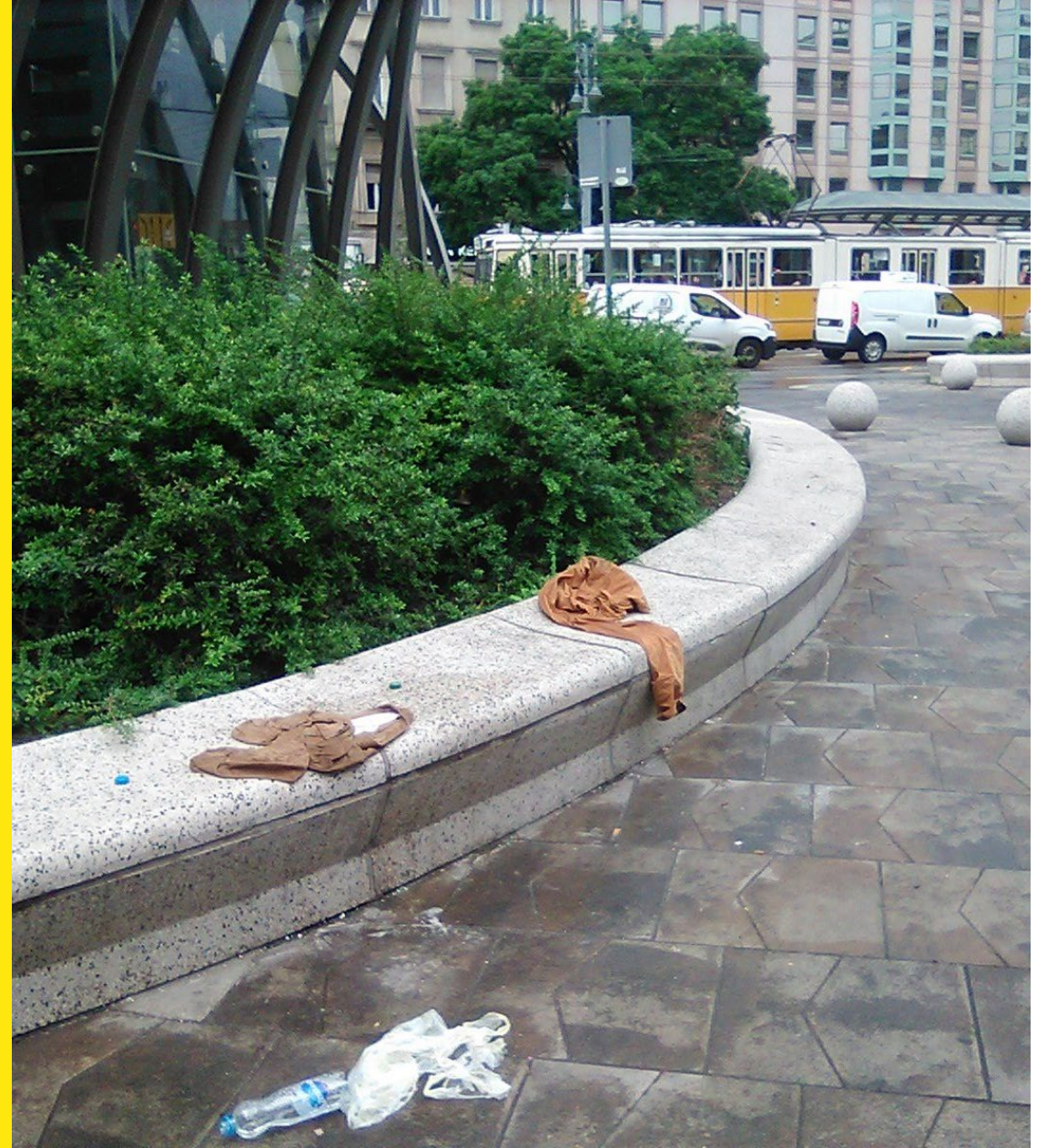
The Case of Eastern European Homeless Roma in Switzerland

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Destitute CEE Roma in Switzerland

- **10-12 Million Roma** in Europe (the largest ethnic minority in the EU/EEA), most of them live in Central and Eastern Europe (Frau 2023, Yldiz and Genova 2018)
- The Roma are **particularly mobile** compared to other vulnerable groups. Migration waves to Canada (Durst 2013), then to the UK and finally to Western Europe (FRA 2023)
- **80 000 - 100 000 Roma people live in Switzerland** (50 – 60 th. Swiss Roma, 20 – 30 th. CEE migrants and 4-5 th. Western European travelers) + ca. 2000 Ukrainian Roma fleeing from war
- Schengen membership of CEE countries: **easy entry to Switzerland** (Christen and Curt 2021)
- Uncertainties in Swiss cities are more promising than facing exclusion and poverty at home.
- Roma beggars, sex workers, street musicians, and rough sleepers belong to the everyday image of Swiss cities (Colombo et al. 2015, Coulon et al. 2017)

Responses of the Swiss cantons

- 26 various social policies
- Handling the Roma through **migration policy measures** instead of welfare policy supports
- The **«Berner Model»**: a popular and widespread method to deter destitute Roma migrants.
 - Roma are treated as **undocumented aliens** and are handled through the police
 - They are **not eligible to Swiss welfare services**
 - Roma need a valid passport to stay in Switzerland and their stay cannot exceed 90 days
 - Even if they are within 90 days, they need to prove they can sustain themselves financially
 - Otherwise, they will be warned to leave the canton in a written document
 - If they stay, they can be expelled by police force

Why is it so hard to reach the Roma in a research project?

HIDING FORM THE PUBLIC

“I have a sleeping bag, and if I do not have money for accommodation, I sleep elsewhere, everywhere. It is better in summer.” (ZH; Cristiano, 25, Romania)

LANGUAGE BARRIERS / CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

“ If I could speak the language better, I would be able to find an organization that would help us.” (ZH; Ariane, 34, Kosovo/Serbia)

MISTRUST

“ I don't ask [social workers] for help. All the people who work in social work don't help us, the Roma. We have to manage on our own.” (GE; Marian, 44, Romania)

Which research approach can be applied to reach CEE Roma?

BASIC APPROACH

- We conducted a **long-term multi-sited field study** (Johnson et al. 2007)
- employing **mobile methods** such as walking interviews and life-history calendars

SAMPLING

- Random sampling through **snowball method** (in both services and public places) (Flick 2017)
- Delegation of Roma clients through social workers
- Motivation with money, vouchers and small presents

Life history calendars (Morselli and Berchtold 2023)

Age		1. Residency and housing conditions						2. Work and education			
Mention year of birth with a dot				1.3 Type of housing	1.4 Residential instability (if yes, check the box)		1.5 Residence permit (CH)	1.6 Nationality(ies)	1.7 Staying/residing out of Switzerland, while the centre of living was in CH (>3 months)		2.1 Occupation and education training/school
Year	Age	1.1 Country (CH canton initials)	1.2 City/village	1.3 Type of housing	1.4 Residential instability (if yes, check the box)	1.5 Residence permit (CH)	1.6 Nationality(ies)	1.7 Staying/residing out of Switzerland, while the centre of living was in CH (>3 months)	2.1 Occupation and education training/school		
2022		Switzerland (CH)	Zürich	4 (homeless)							
2021		Austria	Vienna	4 (homeless)	x						
2020		Germany	Cologne	3 (new girlfriend)						Working at constructions Quit business because of debts	
2019											
2018											
2017											
2016											
2015											
2014											
2013											
2012											
2011											
2010											
2009											
2008										Own company (laundry and drying)	
2007											
2006											
2005				1 (own home GER, Kassel)							

- Life history calendars show **crucial life events** in a structured and chronological way
- Main domains: housing, employment, health, social relationships (Based on Townsend 1979)
- Prepares qualitative interviews and helps fill information gaps in the narratives
- Objective **life history** vs. subjective **life story**
- Overcomes language barriers
- Data can be converted into quantitative data

Walking interviews (Kühl 2016)

- **Mobile research method** when traditional interviewing cannot be applied
- **Following interviewees** through time and space (shadowing)
- Useful for **mobile people** and when **circumstances are not ideal** for longer narrative interviews
- **Record** interviews
- Choose an **appropriate place** for the interview
- Observe **nonverbal cues** and responses



RESULTS FROM THE INTERVIEWS



Disproportionately many Roma among the rough sleepers

*If I have sleep three or four days outside, it won't be shocking. But after that, two weeks, I can't! I just can't! It's **difficult to sleep outside, for a woman, and all alone**, there are tramps who come, people who are on drugs. (GE; Elena, 37, Romania)*

GENDER VULNERABILITY

*I live on the street. At midnight, when people go to sleep, I seek a bush or a gateway where I can lay my mattress and I leave early in the morning, so that **people do not even know that I sleep in their doorway at night**. (ZH; Sandor, 43, Slovakia)*

HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS

Very limited access to shelters

I lived in a night shelter called Iglu. I could stay only 10 days at Iglu, and there is another shelter in the city center, where I could sleep for 3 more days. (ZH; Ferenc, 41, Hungary)

LIMITED ACCESS

I have heard about the night shelter for Eastern-European homeless people called Iglu, but it is open only from the 1st of November. I cannot sleep on the street so long. (ZH; Peter, 51, Slovakia)

OR NO ACCESS AT ALL

Exploitation and housing usurers

HUMILIATING CONDITIONS AND MODERN SLAVERY

*I was his **slave!** Prepared the dinner, went to bed as he wanted. And if I wasn't happy, sometimes he brought whores, and I had to go out and come back. And I had **no other solution, because of my situation, the lack of permit.** (GE; Dijana, 52, Croatia)*

EXPLOITATION OF HOMELESS WOMEN

*He was happy that I slept more in his apartment, but for me it was only **escape from homelessness.** (...) Later he **used my problem with the sans papier status against me and abused me.** (ZH; Ariana, 34, Kosovo/Serbia)*

Almost impossible to enter the Swiss labor market

I do not have a special qualification. After finishing elementary I had to go to work to support myself and my family. (ZH; Bayram, 43, Kosovo)

POOR QUALIFICATIONS

If I could speak the language better, I would be able to find an organization that would help us. (ZH; Ariane, 34, Kosovo/Serbia)

POOR LANGUAGE SKILLS

There was a possibility at the Zürich Airport, a cleaning position. Only cleaning, but I did not have too much experience and I wasn't admitted. (ZH; Virág, 30, Hungary)

LACK OF EXPERIENCE

Weak social relationships

I came alone and I am still alone. Sleep alone, eat alone and walk alone the whole day long. (ZH; Adrian, 39, Romania)

*I have found some friends. But **they are all homeless people** with a lot of problems. (ZH; Montu, 37, Kosovo/Croatia)*

*Sometimes I call my mother; she is the only one remained me. She is worrying a lot about me and tell me to go home, but **I do not want to be a burden for her.** (ZH; Peter, 52, Slovakia)*

*I still think a lot about my mother, she is always in my head. We talk rarely, and only for 10 minutes. You OK and me Ok, and that is all, **we have nothing to say to each other.** (ZH; Dusan, Bulgaria, 34)*

*I have four children in Romania. They are 20-, 18- and 15-year-olds and the little one is only five. **They are all with my wife in Romania and attend school.** (ZH; David, 50, Romania)*

***I don't ask [social workers] for help.** All the people who work in social work **don't help us, the Roma.** We have to manage on our own. (GE; Marian, 44, Romania)*

LONELINESS

ONLY THE PEER GROUP

BURDEN FOR THE FAMILY

WEAKENING RELATIONSHIPS

CHILDREN REMAIN AT HOME

MISTRUST/DISCRIMINATION



THANK YOU FOR
YOUR KIND
ATTENTION!



Website:
www.obdachlosigkeit.ch

Literature

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